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ENGLISH LITERATURE

ATALANTA'S RACE  
AND  
THE PROUD KING

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ATALANTA'S RACE  
AND  
THE PROUD KING

(FROM "THE EARTHLY PARADISE")

BY  
WILLIAM MORRIS

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES  
FOR THE USE OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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## INTRODUCTION

**W**ILLIAM MORRIS, one of the most eminent imaginative writers of the Victorian age, differs from most other poets and men of letters in two ways—first, he did great work in many other things as well as in literature; secondly, he had beliefs of his own about the meaning and conduct of life, about all that men think and do and make, very different from those of ordinary people, and he carried out these views in his writings as well as in all the other work he did throughout his life.

He was born in 1834. His father, a member of a business firm in the City of London, was a wealthy man and lived in Essex, in a country house with large gardens and fields belonging to it, on the edge of Epping Forest. Until the age of thirteen Morris was at home among a large family of brothers and sisters. He delighted in the country life and especially in the Forest, which is one of the most romantic parts of England, and which he made the scene of many real and imaginary adventures. From fourteen to eighteen he was at school at Marlborough among the Wiltshire downs, in a

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country full of beauty and history, and close to another of the ancient forests of England, that of Savernake. He proceeded from school to Exeter College, Oxford, where he soon formed a close friendship with a remarkable set of young men of his own age; chief among these, and Morris's closest friend for the rest of his life, was Edward Burne-Jones, the painter. Study of the works of John Ruskin confirmed them in the admiration which they already felt for the life and art of the Middle Ages. In the summer vacation of 1855 the two friends went to Northern France to see the beautiful towns and splendid churches with which that country had been filled between the eleventh and the fifteenth centuries; and there they made up their minds that they cared for art more than for anything else, such as wealth or ease or the opinion of the world, and that as soon as they left Oxford they would become artists. By art they meant the making of beauty for the adornment and enrichment of human life, and as artists they meant to strive against all that was ugly or mean or untruthful in the life of their own time.

Art, as they understood it, is one single thing covering the whole of life but practised in many special forms that differ one from another. Among these many forms of art there are two of principal importance. One of the two is the art which is concerned with the making and adorning of the houses in which men and women live; that is to say, architecture, with all its attendant arts of

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decoration, including sculpture, painting, the designing and ornamenting of metal, wood and glass, carpets, paper-hangings, woven, dyed and embroidered cloths of all kinds, and all the furniture which a house may have for use or pleasure. The other is the art which is concerned with the making and adorning of stories in prose and verse. Both of these kinds of art were practised by Morris throughout his life. The former was his principal occupation; he made his living by it, and built up in it a business which alone made him famous, and which has had a great influence towards bringing more beauty into daily domestic life in England and in other countries also. His profession was thus that of a manufacturer, designer, and decorator. When he had to describe himself by a single word, he called himself a designer. But it is the latter branch of his art which principally concerns us now, the art of a maker and adorer of stories. He became famous in this kind of art also, both in prose and verse, as a romance-writer and a poet. But he spoke of it as play rather than work, and although he spent much time and great pains on it, he regarded it as relaxation from the harder and more constant work of his life, which was carrying on the business of designing, painting, weaving, dyeing, printing and other occupations of that kind. In later life he also gave much of his time to political and social work, with the object of bringing back mankind into a path from which they had strayed since the end of the Middle Ages, and creating a

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state of society in which art, by the people and for the people, a joy to the maker and the user, might be naturally, easily, and universally produced.

Even as a boy Morris had been noted for his love of reading and inventing tales; but he did not begin to write any until he had been for a couple of years at Oxford. His earliest poems and his earliest written prose tales belong to the same year, 1855, in which he determined to make art his profession. The first of either that he published appeared in the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, which was started and managed by him and his friends in 1856. In 1858, after he had left Oxford, he brought out a volume of poems called, after the title of the first poem in the book, "The Defence of Guenevere." Soon afterwards he founded, with some of his old Oxford friends and others whom he had made in London, among whom Dante Gabriel Rossetti was the leading spirit, the firm of Morris and Company, manufacturers and decorators. His business, in which he was the principal and finally the sole partner, took up the main part of his time. He had also married, and built himself a beautiful small house in Kent, the decoration of which went busily on for several years. Among all these other occupations he almost gave up writing stories, but never ceased reading and thinking about them. In 1865 he came back to live in London, where, being close to his work, he had more leisure for other things; and between 1865 and 1870 he wrote between thirty and forty tales



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in verse, containing not less than seventy or eighty thousand lines in all. The longest of these tales, "The Life and Death of Jason," appeared in 1867. It is the old Greek story of the ship *Argo* and the voyage in quest of the Golden Fleece. Twenty-five other tales are included in "The Earthly Paradise," published in three parts between 1868 and 1870.

During these years Morris learned Icelandic, and his next published works were translations of some of the Icelandic sagas, writings composed from six to nine hundred years ago, and containing a mass of legends, histories and romances finely told in a noble language. These translations were followed in 1876 by his great epic poem, "Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs." In that poem he retold a story of which an Icelandic version, the "Volsunga Saga," written in the twelfth century, is one of the world's masterpieces. It is the great epic of Northern Europe, just as the "Iliad" and "Odyssey" of Homer are the chief epics of ancient Greece, and the "Æneid" of Virgil the chief epic of the Roman Empire. Morris's love for these great stories of ancient times led him to rewrite the tale of the Volsungs and Niblungs, which he reckoned the finest of them all, more fully and on a larger scale than it had ever been written before. He had already, in 1875, translated the "Æneid" into verse, and some ten years later, in 1886-87, he also made a verse translation of the "Odyssey." In 1873 he had also written another very beautiful poem, "Love is Enough,"

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containing the story of three pairs of lovers, a countryman and country-woman, an emperor and empress, and a prince and peasant girl. This poem was written in the form of a play, not of a narrative.

To write prose was at first for Morris more difficult than to write poetry. Verse came naturally to him, and he composed in prose only with much effort until after long practice. Except for his early tales in the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine and his translations of Icelandic sagas, he wrote little but poetry until the year 1882. About that time he began to give lectures and addresses, and wrote them in great numbers during the latter part of his life. A number of them were collected and published in two volumes called "Hopes and Fears for Art" and "Signs of Change," and many others have been published separately. He thus gradually accustomed himself to prose composition. For several years he was too busy with other things, which he thought more important, to spend time on story-telling; but his instinct forced itself out again, and in 1886 he began the series of romances in prose or in mixed prose and verse which went on during the next ten years. The chief of these are, "A Dream of John Ball," "The House of the Wolfings," "The Roots of the Mountains," "News from Nowhere," "The Glittering Plain," "The Wood beyond the World," "The Well at the World's End," "The Water of the Wondrous Isles," and "The Sundering Flood." During the same years he also translated, out of Icelandic and

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old French books, more of the stories which he had long known and admired. "The Sundering Flood" was written in his last illness, and finished by him within a few days of his death, in the autumn of 1896.

"The Earthly Paradise" is the largest and most important of all Morris's poetical works. It is also the most striking instance of what he meant by the art of poetry; that is to say, the skilfully designed construction, and the furnishing with beautiful and appropriate ornament, of a house of tales, in which the reader may find shelter, enjoyment and rest. For this purpose he selected, from among the vast number of stories he knew, those which he liked best. These he retold, redesigning them so far as he thought fit, and putting into them details and descriptions suggested by his wide knowledge, his vivid imagination, and his intense love of beauty. The idea of a series of narrative poems arranged within a single framework came to him in the first instance from "The Canterbury Tales" of Geoffrey Chaucer (1328-1400), the English poet among his predecessors whom he most loved and admired. In Chaucer the stories are supposed to be told by a company of pilgrims who are riding together from London to visit the shrine of Saint Thomas of Canterbury. Morris invented a larger and more romantic framework for his collection of tales. The story inside which the rest of the stories are set is this. Certain persons set sail, in the autumn of the year 1372,

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from a country then being ravaged by the terrible pestilence known as the Black Death, to try to discover among the unexplored Western seas an Earthly Paradise where there was no sickness or old age or death, of which rumours were current in Europe throughout the Middle Ages. Among the crew are men from more than one country. The leader of the expedition is a Norseman, who had been born at Constantinople, where his father was serving in the famous corps of the Varangians, a bodyguard chiefly composed of Norse and English, attached to the person of the Greek Emperors. One of his companions is a scholar from Swabia in Central Germany, who knew all the German chronicles, and had read many books of ancient history and of magic. Another is a Breton, who had been driven from his home in the French wars. They sail out into the Atlantic through the English Channel, where they fall in with the fleet of Edward III. on its way to France with the king himself, the Black Prince, and a great English army. At last they reach America, as Columbus actually did a century later. After many wanderings and adventures, in which, however, they never succeed in finding that Earthly Paradise of which they are in search, the remnant of them, now old men, arrive at an island in a distant sea, where the people speak the Greek language and are the descendants of an ancient Greek colony which had existed there for many hundreds of years. Here they are kindly received, and settle down to spend the rest of

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their days in peace. It is arranged among them that they shall keep two feasts every month, and at each of these feasts a story is to be told, by one of the Greeks and one of the Wanderers alternately. The twenty-four stories which follow are told in the twelve months which pass after their arrival. Twelve of them are accordingly stories of ancient Greece. The other twelve are stories which were then current in different countries of Western Europe. Some of them are to be found in French and German romances, others in Norse or Icelandic sagas, and some in the Arabian tales, many of which had become known in Europe long before they were collected and written down in the "Book of the Thousand and One Nights."

Two tales from "The Earthly Paradise" are included in this volume, one Greek, the other mediæval. The story of "Atalanta's Race" is the first of the twenty-four. It is told by one of the ancients of the land on an evening in early spring, "when new-born March made fresh the hopeful air." Like the other March story, that of "The Man Born to be King," it is happy, as befits the season: the two are prefaced by the beautiful lyric verses beginning

Slayer of the winter, art thou here again?

and both have in them the joyfulness of life, untroubled by the thought which haunts

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nearly all stories, of the transitoriness of human things—

The end of life so nigh,  
The aim so little, and the joy so vain.

The story of the Arcadian princess Atalanta, the most swift-footed of all men or women, occurs in a number of Greek and Latin authors. The ancient version most familiarly known is that given by Ovid in Book X. of the *Metamorphoses*. The prince who won the race from her by means of the golden apples given him by Venus is there called Hippomenes: Milanion is the name in other versions. This or another Atalanta took part in the famous Hunting of Calydon, on the story of which is based Swinburne's dramatic poem of "Atalanta in Calydon."

On the spirit in which Morris took up and retold the story the best comment is to be found in his own words: they are written about another of the Greek stories in "The Earthly Paradise," but apply equally well to this one.

No new thing I bring you ; yet ye may  
Be pleased to hear an ancient tale again,  
That, told so long ago, doth yet remain  
Fresh e'en 'mongst us, far from the Argive land :  
Which tale this book, writ wholly by mine hand,  
Holds gathered up as I have heard it told.

Surely I fear me, midst the ancient gold  
Base metal ye will light on here and there,  
Though I have noted everything with care,  
And with good will have set down nothing new,  
Nor holds the land another book for you

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That has the tale in full with nought beside,  
So unto me let your good word betide;  
Though, take it as ye may, no small delight  
I had, herein this well-loved tale to write.

The story of "The Proud King" is told by one of the Wanderers, a man of Drontheim in Norway, as he had heard it himself in his youth when in England. He had, while there on his travels, been entertained in the guest-house of the great Benedictine Abbey at Peterborough.

I, who have seen  
So many lands, and midst such marvels been,  
Clearer than these abodes of outland men,  
Can see above the green and unburnt fen  
The little houses of an English town,  
Cross-timbered, thatched with fen-reeds coarse and brown,  
And high o'er these, three gables, great and fair,  
That slender rods of columns do upbear  
Over the minster doors, and imagery  
Of kings, and flowers no summer field doth see,  
Wrought on those gables.—Yea, I heard withal,  
In the fresh morning air, the trowels fall  
Upon the stone, a thin noise far away;  
For high up wrought the masons on that day,  
Since to the monks that house seemed scarcely well  
Till they had set a spire or pinnacle  
Each side the great porch. In that burgh I heard  
This tale, and late have set down every word  
That I remembered, when the thoughts would come  
Of what we did in our deserted home,  
And of the days, long past, when we were young,  
Nor knew the cloudy woes that o'er us hung.  
And howsoever I am now grown old,  
Yet is it still the tale I then heard told  
Within the guest-house of that minster-close,  
Whose walls, like cliffs new-made, before us rose.

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The abbey church was mainly built in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; but a spire and pinnacles were added to the magnificent triple-arched west front by Henry de Morcot early in the fourteenth century, and it is this work of which the narrator speaks as having been seen by him in progress. The abbey church or minster did not become a cathedral until 1541.

The story was a very favourite one throughout Europe in the Middle Ages. "A certain King, blinded by pride, thought that he was something more than man, if not equal to God; but such a judgment fell on him that none knew him for king, and he suffered many things, till in the end, humbling himself, he regained his kingdom and honour." It occurs in the celebrated collection of tales called *Gesta Romanorum*, which had a wide circulation in the Middle Ages. When or where that collection was first made is not known. It was written in Latin, which was then a language used in common by all educated persons throughout Europe. It was well known and much read in England, France, and Germany, and there are early translations of it in the languages of all three countries. The name *Gesta Romanorum*, "The Deeds of the Romans," was given to it because the greater number of the stories in it are told of real or imaginary Roman Emperors. But this story is in its main lines much older; it is told, with some variations, in the ancient Jewish legends of King Solomon. No King or Emperor called



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Jovinian is recorded in history, but the name was a common one in the later Roman Empire. The Jovinian mentioned by Chaucer in "The Sompnour's Tale" was a theological writer, and has nothing to do with this story.

Those who can obtain and read the Latin, French, or English versions of the story of Jovinian in the *Gesta* will find it very interesting to trace how Morris, while keeping to their main lines, has varied the incidents and enriched the detail. In "Atalanta's Race" he had merely the brief outline of a story to work upon, and filled it up from his own imagination. Here, however, he not only added much, but altered freely, so as to make the story more vivid, various, and dramatic. With his faultless sense of design, and his instinct for telling a story in the best possible way, he has thus constructed a masterpiece of narrative, in which all is enriched, but nothing is superfluous: the episodes lead on one to another with increasing effect, and the ornament is everywhere fitting, and everywhere adds life and beauty. To show the way in which Morris handles the story, a few instances may be given.

In the English version of the *Gesta*, the opening of the story is as follows: "Jovinian was reigning, a wise Emperor, in the city of Rome; and he was rich in possessions. It happed that he thought in a night, as he lay in his bed, Whether there be any God but I? And when he arose, he called his knights and squires and said, Sirs, look ye be ready,

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for "I will go hunt to-day." This Morris has expanded into the first eight stanzas of the poem. In the *Gesta* the Emperor, when left naked, goes first to the house of a knight, then to the house of an earl; in both he is beaten and turned out of doors with ignominy. Morris varies the action by making him meet the latter on the road at night. The episode of the kind simple countryman who takes him to the city in his waggon is of Morris' invention; on the other hand, the lively touch of Jovinian's own hound not knowing him, and flying at him, is in the original story. At the end, in the *Gesta*, the two Emperors meet face to face before all the court, who are amazed, and cannot tell which is the true king; then the angel proclaims who he is, relates what has happened, and adds that he had been sent to take Jovinian's place until he had done his penance and repented, "that the Empire should not perish." The beautiful ending to Morris' story (in the last six stanzas of the poem) is thus wholly his own.

Both these poems are written in the same verse, the seven-lined stanza called rhyme-royal. It was one of the favourite metres of Chaucer, who was Morris' master in poetry; in it are written several of the "Canterbury Tales," as well as Chaucer's great masterpiece of "Troilus and Creseide." Chaucer took it, as he took most of his metrical forms, from the French, and not only naturalised it in England, but gave it a new beauty, and established it as one of the chief forms for long narrative

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poems. For this purpose it is less monotonous than the couplet, and much more elastic and manageable than the nine-lined Spenserian stanza. It was much used by Chaucer's successors in England, but after the end of the sixteenth century (when Shakespeare employed it in his "Lucrece") it fell out of favour. Morris fully reinstated it in its older position. No one else, except Chaucer himself, has used it with such easy mastery, such fluency and sweetness.



## ATALANTA'S RACE

### ARGUMENT

ATALANTA, daughter of King Schoeneus, not willing to lose her virgin's estate, made it a law to all suitors that they should run a race with her in the public place, and if they failed to overcome her should die unrevenged; and thus many brave men perished. At last came Milanion, the son of Amphidamas, who, outrunning her with the help of Venus, gained the virgin and wedded her.

THROUGH thick Arcadian woods a hunter went,  
Following the beasts up, on a fresh spring day :  
But since his horn-tipped bow, but seldom bent,  
Now at the noontide nought had happed to slay,  
Within a vale he called his hounds away, 5  
Harkening the echoes of his lone voice cling  
About the cliffs and through the beech-trees ring.

But when they ended, still awhile he stood,  
And but the sweet familiar thrush could hear,  
And all the day-long noises of the wood, 10  
And o'er the dry leaves of the vanished year  
His hounds' feet pattering as they drew anear,  
And heavy breathing from their heads low hung,  
To see the mighty cornel bow unstrung.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Then smiling did he turn to leave the place, 15  
But with his first step some new fleeting thought  
A shadow cast across his sun-burnt face ;  
I think the golden net that April brought  
From some warm world his wavering soul had caught ;  
For, sunk in vague sweet longing, did he go 20  
Betwixt the trees with doubtful steps and slow.

Yet howsoever slow he went, at last  
The trees grew sparser, and the wood was done ;  
Whereon one farewell, backward look he cast,  
Then, turning round to see what place was won, 25  
With shaded eyes looked underneath the sun,  
And o'er green meads and new-turned furrows brown  
Beheld the gleaming of King Schoeneus' town.

So thitherward he turned, and on each side  
The folk were busy on the teeming land, 30  
And man and maid from the brown furrows cried,  
Or midst the newly-blossomed vines did stand,  
And as the rustic weapon pressed the hand  
Thought of the nodding of the well-filled ear,  
Or how the knife the heavy bunch should shear. 35

Merry it was : about him sung the birds,  
The spring flowers bloomed along the firm dry road,  
The sleek-skinned mothers of the sharp-horned herds  
Now for the barefoot milking-maidens lowed ;  
While from the freshness of his blue abode, 40  
Glad his death-bearing arrows to forget,  
The broad sun blazed, nor scattered plagues as yet.

## ATALANTA'S RACE

Through such fair things unto the gates he came,  
And found them open, as though peace were there ;  
Wherethrough, unquestioned of his race or name, 45  
He entered, and along the streets gan fare,  
Which at the first of folk were well-nigh bare ;  
But pressing on, and going more hastily,  
Men hurrying too he gan at last to see.

Following the last of these, he still pressed on, 50  
Until an open space he came unto,  
Where wreaths of fame had oft been lost and won,  
For feats of strength folk there were wont to do.  
And now our hunter looked for something new,  
Because the whole wide space was bare, and stilled 55  
The high seats were, with eager people filled.

There with the others to a seat he gat,  
Whence he beheld a broidered canopy,  
Neath which in fair array King Schœneus sat  
Upon his throne with councillors thereby ; 60  
And underneath his well-wrought seat and high  
He saw a golden image of the sun,  
A silver image of the Fleet-foot One.

A brazen altar stood beneath their feet  
Whereon a thin flame flickered in the wind, 65  
Nigh this a herald clad in raiment meet  
Made ready even now his horn to wind,  
By whom a huge man held a sword, entwined  
With yellow flowers ; these stood a little space  
From off the altar, nigh the starting-place. 70

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And there two runners did the sign abide,  
Foot set to foot,—a young man slim and fair  
Crisp-haired, well knit, with firm limbs often tried  
In places where no man his strength may spare ;  
Dainty his thin coat was, and on his hair 75  
A golden circlet of renown he wore,  
And in his hand an olive garland bore.

But on this day with whom shall he contend ?  
A maid stood by him like Diana clad  
When in the woods she lists her bow to bend, 80  
Too fair for one to look on and be glad,  
Who scarcely yet has thirty summers had,  
If he must still behold her from afar ;  
Too fair to let the world live free from war.

She seemed all earthly matters to forget ; 85  
Of all tormenting lines her face was clear,  
Her wide grey eyes upon the goal were set  
Calm and unmoved as though no soul were near,  
But her foe trembled as a man in fear,  
Nor from her loveliness one moment turned 90  
His anxious face with fierce desire that burned.

Now through the hush there broke the trumpet's  
    clang  
Just as the setting sun made eventide.  
Then from light feet a spurt of dust there sprang,  
And swiftly were they running side by side ; 95  
But silent did the thronging folk abide  
Until the turning-post was reached at last,  
And round about it still abreast they passed.



## ATALANTA'S RACE

But when the people saw how close they ran;  
When halfway to the starting-point they were, 100  
A cry of joy broke forth, whereat the man  
Headed the white-foot runner, and drew near  
Unto the very end of all his fear;  
And scarce his straining feet the ground could feel,  
And bliss unhop'd for o'er his heart gan steal. 105

But midst the loud victorious shouts he heard  
Her footsteps drawing nearer, and the sound  
Of fluttering raiment, and thereat afeard  
His flushed and eager face he turned around,  
And even then he felt her past him bound 110  
Fleet as the wind, but scarcely saw her there  
Till on the goal she laid her fingers fair.

There stood she breathing like a little child  
Amid some warlike clamour laid asleep;  
For no victorious joy her red lips smiled, 115  
Her cheek its wonted freshness did but keep;  
No glance lit up her clear grey eyes and deep,  
Though some divine thought softened all her face  
As once more rang the trumpet through the place.

But her late foe stopped short amidst his course, 120  
One moment gazed upon her piteously,  
Then with a groan his lingering feet did force  
To leave the spot whence he her eyes could see;  
And, changed like one who knows his time must be  
But short and bitter, without any word 125  
He knelt before the bearer of the sword;

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Then high rose up the gleaming deadly blade,  
Bared of its flowers, and through the crowded place  
Was silence now, and midst of it the maid  
Went by the poor wretch at a gentle pace, 130  
And he to hers upturned his sad white face ;  
Nor did his eyes behold another sight  
Ere on his soul there fell eternal night.

SO was the pageant ended, and all folk  
Talking of this and that familiar thing 135  
In little groups from that sad concourse broke,  
For now the shrill bats were upon the wing,  
And soon dark night would slay the evening,  
And in dark gardens sang the nightingale  
Her little-heeded, oft-repeated tale. 140

And with the last of all the hunter went,  
Who, wondering at the strange sight he had seen,  
Prayed an old man to tell him what it meant,  
Both why the vanquished man so slain had been,  
And if the maiden were an earthly queen, 145  
Or rather what much more she seemed to be,  
No sharer in the world's mortality.

"Stranger," said he, "I pray she soon may die  
Whose lovely youth has slain so many an one !  
King Schoeneus' daughter is she verily, 150  
Who when her eyes first looked upon the sun

## ATALANTA'S RACE

Was fain to end her life but new begun,  
For he had vowed to leave but men alone  
Sprung from his loins when he from earth was gone.

“Therefore he bade one leave her in the wood, 155  
And let wild things deal with her as they might,  
But this being done, some cruel god thought good  
To save her beauty in the world's despite :  
Folk say that her, so delicate and white  
As now she is, a rough root-grubbing bear 160  
Amidst her shapeless cubs at first did rear.

“In course of time the woodfolk slew her nurse,  
And to their rude abode the youngling brought,  
And reared her up to be a kingdom's curse,  
Who grown a woman, of no kingdom thought, 165  
But armed and swift, mid beasts destruction wrought,  
Nor spared two shaggy centaur kings to slay  
To whom her body seemed an easy prey.

“So to this city, led by fate, she came ;  
Whom known by signs, whereof I cannot tell, 170  
King Schœneus for his child at last did claim,  
Nor elsewhere since that day doth she dwell,  
Sending too many a noble soul to hell—  
What ! thine eyes glisten ! what then, thinkest thou  
Her shining head unto the yoke to bow ? 175

“Listen, my son, and love some other maid,  
For she the saffron gown will never wear,  
And on no flower-strewn couch shall she be laid,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Nor shall her voice make glad a lover's ear :  
Yet if of Death thou hast not any fear, 180  
Yea, rather, if thou lov'st him utterly,  
Thou still may'st woo her ere thou com'st to die,

“ Like him that on this day thou saw'st lie dead ;  
For, fearing as I deem the Sea-born One,  
The maid has vowed e'en such a man to wed 185  
As in the course her swift feet can outrun,  
But whoso fails herein, his days are done :  
He came the nighest that was slain to-day,  
Although with him I deem she did but play.

“ Behold, such mercy Atalanta gives 190  
To those that long to win her loveliness ;  
Be wise ! be sure that many a maid there lives  
Gentler than she, of beauty little less,  
Whose swimming eyes thy loving words shall bless,  
When in some garden, knee set close to knee, 195  
Thou sing'st the song that love may teach to thee.”

So to the hunter spake that ancient man,  
And left him for his own home presently :  
But he turned round, and through the moonlight wan  
Reached the thick wood, and there twixt tree and tree 200  
Distraught he passed the long night feverishly,  
Twixt sleep and waking, and at dawn arose  
To wage hot war against his speechless foes.

There to the hart's flank seemed his shaft to grow,  
As panting down the broad green glades he flew, 205  
There by his horn the Dryads well might know

## ATALANTA'S RACE

His thrust against the bear's heart had been true,  
And there Adonis' bane his javelin slew,  
But still in vain through rough and smooth he went,  
For none the more his restlessness was spent. 210

So wandering, he to Argive cities came,  
And in the lists with valiant men he stood,  
And by great deeds he won him praise and fame,  
And heaps of wealth for little-valued blood ;  
But none of all these things, or life, seemed good 215  
Unto his heart, where still unsatisfied  
A ravenous longing warred with fear and pride.

Therefore it happed when but a month had gone  
Since he had left King Schœneus' city old,  
In hunting-gear again, again alone 220  
The forest-border meads did he behold,  
Where still mid thoughts of August's quivering gold  
Folk hoed the wheat, and clipped the vine in trust  
Of faint October's purple-foaming must.

And once again he passed the peaceful gate, 225  
While to his beating heart his lips did lie,  
That owning not victorious love and fate,  
Said, half aloud, " And here too must I try,  
To win of alien men the mastery,  
And gather for my head fresh meed of fame 230  
And cast new glory on my father's name."

In spite of that, how beat his heart, when first  
Folk said to him, " And art thou come to see  
That which still makes our city's name accurst

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Among all mothers for its cruelty ? 235  
Then know indeed that fate is good to thee,  
Because to-morrow a new luckless one  
Against the whitefoot maid is pledged to run."

So on the morrow with no curious eyes  
As once he did, that piteous sight he saw, 240  
Nor did that wonder in his heart arise  
As toward the goal the conquering maid gan draw,  
Nor did he gaze upon her eyes with awe :  
Too full the pain of longing filled his heart  
For fear or wonder there to have a part. 245

But O, how long the night was ere it went !  
How long it was before the dawn begun  
Showed to the wakening birds the sun's intent  
That not in darkness should the world be done !  
And then, and then, how long before the sun 250  
Bade silently the toilers of the earth  
Get forth to fruitless cares or empty mirth !

And long it seemed that in the market-place  
He stood and saw the chaffering folk go by,  
Ere from the ivory throne King Schœneus' face 255  
Looked down upon the murmur royally,  
But then came trembling that the time was nigh  
When he midst pitying looks his love must claim,  
And jeering voices must salute his name.

But as the throng he pierced to gain the throne, 260  
His alien face distraught and anxious told

## ATALANTA'S RACE

What hopeless errand he was bound upon,  
And, each to each, folk whispered to behold  
His godlike limbs ; nay, and one woman old  
As he went by must pluck him by the sleeve 265  
And pray him yet that wretched love to leave.

For sidling up she said, " Canst thou live twice,  
Fair son ? canst thou have joyful youth again,  
That thus thou goest to the sacrifice  
Thyself the victim ? nay then, all in vain 270  
Thy mother bore her longing and her pain,  
And one more maiden on the earth must dwell  
Hopeless of joy, nor fearing death and hell.

" O, fool, thou knowest not the compact then  
That with the three-formed goddess she has made 275  
To keep her from the loving lips of men,  
And in no saffron gown to be arrayed,  
And therewithal with glory to be paid,  
And love of her the moonlit river sees  
White gainst the shadow of the formless trees. 280

" Come back, and I myself will pray for thee  
Unto the sea-born framer of delights,  
To give thee her who on the earth may be  
The fairest stirrer up to death and fights,  
To quench with hopeful days and joyous nights 285  
The flame that doth thy youthful heart consume ;  
Come back, nor give thy beauty to the tomb."

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

How should he listen to her earnest speech ?  
Words, such as he not once or twice had said  
Unto himself, whose meaning scarce could reach 290  
The firm abode of that sad hardihead—  
He turned about, and through the market-stead  
Swiftly he passed, until before the throne  
In the cleared space he stood at last alone.

Then said the King, "Stranger, what dost thou 295  
here ?  
Have any of my folk done ill to thee ?  
Or art thou of the forest men in fear ?  
Or art thou of the sad fraternity  
Who still will strive my daughter's mates to be,  
Staking their lives to win to earthly bliss 300  
The lonely maid, the friend of Artemis ?"

"O King," he said, "thou sayest the word indeed ;  
Nor will I quit the strife till I have won  
My sweet delight, or death to end my need.  
And know that I am called Milanion, 305  
Of King Amfidamas the well-loved son :  
So fear not that to thy old name, O King,  
Much loss or shame my victory will bring."

"Nay, Prince," said Schoeneus, "welcome to this  
land  
Thou wert indeed, if thou wert here to try 310  
Thy strength gainst some one mighty of his hand ;  
Nor would we grudge thee well-won mastery.



## ATALANTA'S RACE

But now, why wilt thou come to me to die,  
And at my door lay down thy luckless head,  
Swelling the band of the unhappy dead, 315

“Whose curses even now my heart doth fear?  
Lo, I am old, and know what life can be,  
And what a bitter thing is death anear.  
O son! be wise, and hearken unto me,  
And if no other can be dear to thee, 320  
At least as now, yet is the world full wide,  
And bliss in seeming-hopeless hearts may hide:

“But if thou lovest life, then all is lost.”  
“Nay, King,” Milanion said, “thy words are vain.  
Doubt not that I have counted well the cost. 325  
But say, on what day wilt thou that I gain  
Fulfilled delight, or death to end my pain?  
Right glad were I if it could be to-day,  
And all my doubts at rest for ever lay.”

“Nay,” said King Schœneus, “thus it shall not be, 330  
But rather shalt thou let a month go by,  
And weary with thy prayers for victory  
What god thou know'st the kindest and most nigh.  
So doing, still perchance thou shalt not die:  
And with my goodwill wouldst thou have the maid 335  
For of the equal gods I grow afraid.

“And until then, O Prince, be thou my guest,  
And all these troublous things awhile forget.”

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

"Nay," said he, "couldst thou give my soul good  
rest,

And on mine head a sleepy garland set, 340  
Then had I scaped the meshes of the net,  
Nor shouldst thou hear from me another word ;  
But now, make sharp thy fearful heading sword.

"Yet will I do what son of man may do,  
And promise all the gods may most desire, 345  
That to myself I may at least be true ;  
And on that day my heart and limbs so tire,  
With utmost strain and measureless desire,  
That, at the worst, I may but fall asleep  
When in the sunlight round that sword shall 350  
sweep."

He went therewith, nor anywhere would bide,  
But unto Argos restlessly did wend ;  
And there, as one who lays all hope aside,  
Because the leech has said his life must end,  
Silent farewell he bade to foe and friend, 355  
And took his way unto the restless sea,  
For there he deemed his rest and help might be.

UPON the shore of Argolis there stands  
A temple to the goddess that he sought,  
That, turned unto the lion-bearing lands, 360

## ATALANTA'S RACE

Fenced from the east, of cold winds hath no thought,  
Though to no homestead there the sheaves are  
brought,  
No groaning press torments the close-clipped murk,  
Lonely the fane stands, far from all men's work.

Pass through a close, set thick with myrtle-trees, 365  
Through the brass doors that guard the holy place,  
And entering, hear the washing of the seas  
That twice a-day rise high above the base,  
And with the south-west urging them, embrace  
The marble feet of her that standeth there 370  
That shrink not, naked though they be and fair.

Small is the fane through which the seawind  
sings  
About Queen Venus' well-wrought image white,  
But hung around are many precious things,  
The gifts of those who, longing for delight, 375  
Have hung them there within the goddess' sight,  
And in return have taken at her hands  
The living treasures of the Grecian lands.

And thither now has come Milanion,  
And showed unto the priests' wide open eyes 380  
Gifts fairer than all those that there have shone,  
Silk cloths, inwrought with Indian fantasies,  
And bowls inscribed with sayings of the wise  
Above the deeds of foolish living things,  
And mirrors fit to be the gifts of kings. 385

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And now before the Sea-born One he stands,  
By the sweet veiling smoke made dim and soft,  
And while the incense trickles from his hands,  
And while the odorous smoke-wreaths hang aloft,  
Thus doth he pray to her : " O Thou, who oft 390  
Hast holpen man and maid in their distress,  
Despise me not for this my wretchedness !

" O goddess, among us who dwell below,  
Kings and great men, great for a little while,  
Have pity on the lowly heads that bow, 395  
Nor hate the hearts that love them without guile ;  
Wilt thou be worse than these, and is thy smile  
A vain device of him who set thee here,  
An empty dream of some artificer ?

" O, great one, some men love, and are ashamed ; 400  
Some men are weary of the bonds of love ;  
Yea, and by some men lightly art thou blamed,  
That from thy toils their lives they cannot move,  
And mid the ranks of men their manhood prove.  
Alas ! O goddess, if thou slayest me 405  
What new immortal can I serve but thee ?

" Think then, will it bring honour to thy head  
If folk say, ' Everything aside he cast  
And to all fame and honour was he dead,  
And to his one hope now is dead at last, 410  
Since all unholpen he is gone and past :  
Ah, the gods love not man, for certainly,  
He to his helper did not cease to cry.' "

## ATALANTA'S RACE

“Nay, but thou wilt help; they who died before  
Not single-hearted as I deem came here, 415  
Therefore unthanked they laid their gifts before  
Thy stainless feet, still shivering with their fear,  
Lest in their eyes their true thought might appear,  
Who sought to be the lords of that fair town,  
Dreaded of men and winners of renown. 420

“O Queen, thou knowest I pray not for this :  
O set us down together in some place  
Where not a voice can break our heaven of bliss,  
Where nought but rocks and I can see her face,  
Softening beneath the marvel of thy grace, 425  
Where not a foot our vanished steps can track—  
The golden age, the golden age come back !

“O fairest, hear me now who do thy will,  
Plead for thy rebel that she be not slain,  
But live and love and be thy servant still ; 430  
Ah, give her joy and take away my pain,  
And thus two long-enduring servants gain.  
An easy thing this is to do for me,  
What need of my vain words to weary thee !

“But none the less, this place will I not leave 435  
Until I needs must go my death to meet,  
Or at thy hands some happy sign receive  
That in great joy we twain may one day greet  
Thy presence here and kiss thy silver feet,  
Such as we deem thee, fair beyond all words, 440  
Victorious o'er our servants and our lords.”

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Then from the altar back a space he drew,  
But from the Queen turned not his face away,  
But gainst a pillar leaned, until the blue  
That arched the sky, at ending of the day, 445  
Was turned to ruddy gold and changing grey,  
And clear, but low, the nigh-ebbed windless sea  
In the still evening murmured ceaselessly.

And there he stood when all the sun was down,  
Nor had he moved, when the dim golden light, 450  
Like the far lustre of a godlike town,  
Had left the world to seeming-hopeless night,  
Nor would he move the more when wan moonlight  
Streamed through the pillars for a little while,  
And lighted up the white Queen's changeless smile. 455

Nought noted he the shallow-flowing sea  
As step by step it set the wrack a-swim,  
The yellow torchlight nothing noted he  
Wherein with fluttering gown and half-bared limb  
The temple damsels sung their midnight hymn, 460  
And nought the doubled stillness of the fane  
When they were gone and all was hushed again.

But when the waves had touched the marble base,  
And steps the fish swim over twice a-day,  
The dawn beheld him sunken in his place 465  
Upon the floor; and sleeping there he lay,  
Not heeding aught the little jets of spray  
The roughened sea brought nigh, across him cast,  
For as one dead all thought from him had passed.

## ATALANTA'S RACE

Yet long before the sun had showed his head, 470  
Long ere the varied hangings on the wall  
Had gained once more their blue and green and red,  
He rose as one some well-known sign doth call  
When war upon the city's gates doth fall,  
And scarce like one fresh risen out of sleep, 475  
He gan again his broken watch to keep.

Then he turned round ; not for the sea-gull's cry  
That wheeled above the temple in his flight,  
Not for the fresh south wind that lovingly  
Breathed on the new-born day and dying night, 480  
But some strange hope twixt fear and great delight  
Drew round his face, now flushed, now pale and wan,  
And still constrained his eyes the sea to scan.

Now a faint light lit up the southern sky,  
Not sun nor moon, for all the world was grey, 485  
But this a bright cloud seemed, that drew anigh,  
Lighting the dull waves that beneath it lay  
As toward the temple still it took its way,  
And still grew greater, till Milanion  
Saw nought for dazzling light that round him shone. 490

But as he staggered with his arms outspread,  
Delicious unnamed odours breathed around ;  
For languid happiness he bowed his head,  
And with wet eyes sank down upon the ground,  
Nor wished for aught, nor any dream he found 495  
To give him reason for that happiness,  
Or make him ask more knowledge of his bliss.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

At last his eyes were cleared, and he could see  
Through happy tears the goddess face to face  
With that faint image of Divinity, 500  
Whose well-wrought smile and dainty changeless  
    grace  
Until that morn so gladdened all the place;  
Then he, unwitting, cried aloud her name  
And covered up his eyes for fear and shame.

But through the stillness he her voice could 505  
    hear  
Piercing his heart with joy scarce bearable,  
That said, "Milanion, wherefore dost thou fear?  
I am not hard to those who love me well;  
List to what I a second time will tell,  
And thou mayest hear perchance, and live to save 510  
The cruel maiden from a loveless grave.

"See, by my feet three golden apples lie—  
Such fruit among the heavy roses falls,  
Such fruit my watchful damsels carefully 515  
Store up within the best loved of my walls,  
Ancient Damascus, where the lover calls  
Above my unseen head, and faint and light  
The rose-leaves flutter round me in the night.

"And note, that these are not alone most fair  
With heavenly gold, but longing strange they 520  
    bring  
Unto the hearts of men, who will not care,  
Beholding these, for any once-loved thing



## ATALANTA'S RACE

Till round the shining sides their fingers cling.  
And thou shalt see thy well-girt swiftfoot maid  
By sight of these amidst her glory stayed. 525

“For bearing these within a scrip with thee,  
When first she heads thee from the starting-place  
Cast down the first one for her eyes to see,  
And when she turns aside make on apace,  
And if again she heads thee in the race 530  
Spare not the other two to cast aside  
If she not long enough behind will bide.

“Farewell, and when has come the happy time  
That she Diana's raiment must unbind  
And all the world seems blessed with Saturn's clime 535  
And thou with eager arms about her twined  
Beholdest first her grey eyes growing kind,  
Surely, O trembler, thou shalt scarcely then  
Forget the Helper of unhappy men.”

Milanion raised his head at this last word, 540  
For now so soft and kind she seemed to be  
No longer of her Godhead was he feard ;  
Too late he looked, for nothing could he see  
But the white image glimmering doubtfully  
In the departing twilight cold and grey, 545  
And those three apples on the steps that lay.

These then he caught up quivering with delight,  
Yet fearful lest it all might be a dream,  
And though aweary with the watchful night,

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And sleepless nights of longing, still did deem 550  
He could not sleep; but yet the first sunbeam  
That smote the fane across the heaving deep  
Shone on him laid in calm untroubled sleep.

But little ere the noontide did he rise,  
And why he felt so happy scarce could tell 555  
Until the gleaming apples met his eyes.  
Then leaving the fair place where this befell  
Oft he looked back as one who loved it well,  
Then homeward to the haunts of men gan wend  
To bring all things unto a happy end. 560

NOW has the lingering month at last gone by,  
Again are all folk round the running place,  
Nor other seems the dismal pageantry  
Than heretofore, but that another face  
Looks o'er the smooth course ready for the race, 565  
For now, beheld of all, Milanion  
Stands on the spot he twice has looked upon.

But yet—what change is this that holds the maid?  
Does she indeed see in his glittering eye  
More than disdain of the sharp shearing blade, 570  
Some happy hope of help and victory?  
The others seemed to say, "We come to die,  
Look down upon us for a little while,  
That dead, we may bethink us of thy smile."

## ATALANTA'S RACE

But he—what look of mastery was this 575  
He cast on her ? why were his lips so red ?  
Why was his face so flushed with happiness ?  
So looks not one who deems himself but dead,  
E'en if to death he bows a willing head ;  
So rather looks a god well pleased to find 580  
Some earthly damsel fashioned to his mind.

Why must she drop her lids before his gaze,  
And even as she casts adown her eyes  
Redden to note his eager glance of praise,  
And wish that she were clad in other guise ? 585  
Why must the memory to her heart arise  
Of things unnoticed when they first were heard,  
Some lover's song, some answering maiden's word ?

What makes these longings, vague, without a  
name,  
And this vain pity never felt before, 590  
This sudden languor, this contempt of fame,  
This tender sorrow for the time past o'er,  
These doubts that grow each minute more and  
more ?  
Why does she tremble as the time grows near,  
And weak defeat and woeful victory fear ? 595

Now while she seemed to hear her beating heart,  
Above their heads the trumpet blast rang out  
And forth they sprang ; and she must play her  
part.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Then flew her white feet, knowing not a doubt,  
Though slackening once, she turned her head 600  
about,  
But then she cried aloud and faster fled  
Than e'er before, and all men deemed him dead.

But with no sound he raised aloft his hand,  
And thence what seemed a ray of light there flew  
And past the maid rolled on along the sand; 605  
Then trembling she her feet together drew  
And in her heart a strong desire there grew  
To have the toy; some god she thought had given  
That gift to her, to make of earth a heaven.

Then from the course with eager steps she ran, 610  
And in her odorous bosom laid the gold.  
But when she turned again, the great-limbed man,  
Now well ahead she failed not to behold,  
And mindful of her glory waxing cold,  
Sprang up and followed him in hot pursuit, 615  
Though with one hand she touched the golden  
fruit.

Note too, the bow that she was wont to bear  
She laid aside to grasp the glittering prize,  
And o'er her shoulder from the quiver fair  
Three arrows fell and lay before her eyes 620  
Unnoticed, as amidst the people's cries  
She sprang to head the strong Milanion,  
Who now the turning-post had well-nigh won.

## ATALANTA'S RACE

But as he set his mighty hand on it  
White fingers underneath his own were laid, 625  
And white limbs from his dazzled eyes did flit,  
Then he the second fruit cast by the maid :  
She ran awhile, and then as one afraid  
Wavered and stopped, and turned and made no  
    stay,  
Until the globe with its bright fellow lay. 630

Then, as a troubled glance she cast around  
Now far ahead the Argive could she see,  
And in her garment's hem one hand she wound  
To keep the double prize, and strenuously  
Sped o'er the course, and little doubt had she 635  
To win the day, though now but scanty space  
Was left betwixt him and the winning place.

Short was the way unto such winged feet,  
Quickly she gained upon him till at last  
He turned about her eager eyes to meet 640  
And from his hand the third fair apple cast.  
She wavered not, but turned and ran so fast  
After the prize that should her bliss fulfil,  
That in her hand it lay ere it was still.

Nor did she rest, but turned about to win 645  
Once more, an unblest woeful victory—  
And yet—and yet—why does her breath begin  
To fail her, and her feet drag heavily?

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Why fails she now to see if far or nigh  
The goal is? why do her grey eyes grow dim?  
Why do these tremors run through every limb? 650

She spreads her arms abroad some stay to find,  
Else must she fall indeed, and findeth this,  
A strong man's arms about her body twined.  
Nor may she shudder now to feel his kiss, 655  
So wrapped she is in new unbroken bliss:  
Made happy that the foe the prize hath won,  
She weeps glad tears for all her glory done.

SHATTER the trumpet, hew adown the posts!  
Upon the brazen altar break the sword, 660  
And scatter incense to appease the ghosts  
Of those who died here by their own award.  
Bring forth the image of the mighty Lord,  
And her who unseen o'er the runners hung,  
And did a deed for ever to be sung. 665

Here are the gathered folk, make no delay,  
Open King Schœneus' well-filled treasury,  
Bring out the gifts long hid from light of day,  
The golden bowls o'erwrought with imagery,  
Gold chains, and unguents brought from over sea, 670  
The saffron gown the old Phœnician brought,  
Within the temple of the Goddess wrought.

## ATALANTA'S RACE

O ye, O damsels, who shall never see  
Her, that Love's servant bringeth now to you,  
Returning from another victory,  
In some cool bower do all that now is due!  
Since she in token of her service new  
Shall give to Venus offerings rich enow,  
Her maiden zone, her arrows, and her bow.

675

## THE PROUD KING

### ARGUMENT

A CERTAIN King, blinded by pride, thought that he was something more than man, if not equal to God; but such a judgment fell on him that none knew him for king, and he suffered many things, till in the end, humbling himself, he regained his kingdom and honour.

IN a far country that I cannot name,  
And on a year long ages past away,  
A King there dwelt, in rest and ease and fame,  
And richer than the Emperor is to-day :  
The very thought of what this man might say, 5  
From dusk to dawn kept many a lord awake;  
For fear of him did many a great man quake.

Young was he when he first sat on the throne,  
And he was wedded to a noble wife,  
But at the daïs must he sit alone, 10  
Nor durst a man speak to him for his life,  
Except with leave: nought knew he change or  
    strife,  
But that the years passed silently away,  
And in his black beard gathered specks of grey.



## THE PROUD KING

Now so it chanced, upon a May morning, ^ 15  
Wakeful he lay when yet low was the sun,  
Looking distraught at many a royal thing,  
And counting up his titles one by one,  
And thinking much of things that he had done ;  
For full of life he felt, and hale and strong, 20  
And knew that none durst say when he did wrong.

For no man now could give him dread or doubt,  
The land was 'neath his sceptre far and wide,  
And at his beck would well-armed myriads shout.  
Then swelled his vain, unthinking heart with pride, 25  
Until at last he raised him up and cried,  
“What need have I for temple or for priest ?  
Am I not God, whiles that I live at least ?”

And yet withal that dead his fathers were,  
He needs must think, that quick the years pass by ; 30  
But he, who seldom yet had seen death near  
Or heard his name, said, “Still I may not die  
Though underneath the earth my fathers lie ;  
My sire indeed was called a mighty king,  
Yet in regard of mine, a little thing 35

“His kingdom was ; moreover his grandsire  
To him was but a prince of narrow lands,  
Whose father, though to things he did aspire  
Beyond most men, a great knight of his hands, 40  
Yet ruled some little town where now there stands  
The kennel of my dogs ; then may not I  
Rise higher yet, nor like poor wretches die ?

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

"Since up the ladder ever we have gone  
Step after step nor fallen back again ;  
And there are tales of people who have won 45  
A life enduring, without care or pain,  
Or any man to make their wishes vain ;  
Perchance this prize unwitting now I hold ;  
For times change fast, the world is waxen old."

So mid these thoughts once more he fell asleep, 50  
And when he woke again, high was the sun ;  
Then quickly from his gold bed did he leap,  
And of his former thoughts remembered none,  
But said, "To-day through green woods will we run,  
Nor shall to-day be worse than yesterday, 55  
But better it may be, for game and play."

So for the hunt was he apparelled,  
And forth he rode with heart right well at ease ;  
And many a strong, deep-chested hound they led,  
Over the dewy grass betwixt the trees, 60  
And fair white horses fit for the white knees  
Of Her the ancients fabled rides a-nights  
Betwixt the setting and the rising lights.

Now following up a mighty hart and swift  
The King rode long upon that morning tide, 65  
And since his horse was worth a kingdom's gift,  
It chanced him all his servants to outride,  
Until unto a shaded river-side  
He came alone at hottest of the sun,  
When all the freshness of the day was done. 70

## THE PROUD KING

Dismounting there, and seeing so far adown  
The red-finned fishes o'er the gravel play,  
It seemed that moment worth his royal crown  
To hide there from the burning of the day,  
Wherefore he did off all his rich array, 75  
And tied his horse unto a neighbouring tree,  
And in the water sported leisurely.

But when he was fulfilled of this delight  
He gat him to the bank well satisfied,  
And thought to do on him his raiment bright 80  
And homeward to his royal house to ride ;  
But mazed and angry, looking far and wide  
Nought saw he of his horse and rich attire,  
And gainst the thief gan threaten vengeance dire.

But little help his fury was to him, 85  
So lustily he gan to shout and cry ;  
None answered ; still the lazy chub did swim  
By inches gainst the stream ; away did fly  
The small pied bird, but nathless stayed anigh,  
And o'er the stream still plied his fluttering trade, 90  
Of such a helpless man not much afraid.

Weary of crying in that lonely place  
He ceased at last, and thinking what to do,  
E'en as he was, up stream he set his face,  
Since not far off a certain house he knew 95  
Where dwelt his ranger, a lord leal and true,  
Who many a bounty at his hands had had,  
And now to do him ease would be right glad.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Thither he hastened on, and as he went  
The hot sun sorely burned his naked skin, 100  
The whiles he thought, "When he to me has lent  
Fine raiment, and at ease I sit within  
His coolest chamber clad in linen thin,  
And drinking wine, the best that he has got,  
I shall forget this troublous day and hot." 105

Now note, that while he thus was on his way,  
And still his people for their master sought,  
There met them one who in the King's array  
Bestrode his very horse, and as they thought  
Was none but he in good time to them brought, 110  
Therefore they hailed him King, and so all rode  
From out the forest to his fair abode.

And there in royal guise he sat at meat,  
Served, as his wont was, neath the canopy,  
And there the hounds fawned round about his feet, 115  
And there that city's elders did he see,  
And with his lords took counsel what should be;  
And there at supper when the day waxed dim  
The Queen within his chamber greeted him.

**L**EAVE we him there; for to the ranger's gate 120  
The other came, and on the horn he blew,  
Till peered the wary porter through the grate  
To see if he, perchance, the blower knew,  
Before he should the wicket gate undo;  
But when he saw him standing there, he cried, 125  
"What dost thou, friend, to show us all thine hide?"

## THE PROUD KING

"We list not buy to-day or flesh or fell ;  
Go home and get thyself a shirt at least,  
If thou wouldst aught, for saith our vicar well,  
That God hath given clothes e'en to the beast." 130  
Therewith he turned to go, but as he ceased  
The King cried out, "Open, O foolish man !  
I am thy lord and King, Jovinian ;

"Go now, and tell thy master I am here  
Desiring food and clothes, and in this plight, 135  
And then hereafter need'st thou have no fear,  
Because thou didst not know me at first sight."  
"Yea, yea, I am but dreaming in the night,"  
The carle said, "and I bid thee, friend, to dream.  
Come through ! here is no gate, it doth but seem." 140

With that his visage vanished from the grate ;  
But when the King now found himself alone,  
He hurled himself against the mighty gate,  
And beat upon it madly with a stone,  
Half wondering midst his rage, how any one 145  
Could live, if longed-for things he chanced to lack ;  
But midst all this, at last the gate flew back,

And there the porter stood, brown-bill in hand,  
And said, "Ah, fool, thou makest this ado,  
Wishing before my lord's high seat to stand ; 150  
Thou shalt be gladder soon hereby to go,  
Or surely nought of handy blows I know.  
Come, willy nilly, thou shalt tell this tale  
Unto my lord, if aught it may avail."

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

With that his staff he handled, as if he 155  
Would smite the King, and said, "Get on before!  
St. Mary! now thou goest full leisurely,  
Who, erewhile, fain wouldst batter down the door.  
See now, if ere this matter is passed o'er  
I come to harm, yet thou shalt not escape, 160  
Thy back is broad enow to pay thy jape."

Half blind with rage the King before him passed,  
But nought of all he doomed him to durst say,  
Lest he from rest nigh won should yet be cast,  
So with a swelling heart he took his way, 165  
Thinking right soon his shame to cast away;  
And the carle followed still, ill satisfied  
With such a wretched losel to abide.

Fair was the ranger's house and new and white,  
And by the King built scarce a year ago, 170  
And carved about for this same lord's delight  
With woodland stories deftly wrought in stone;  
There oft the King was wont to come alone,  
For much he loved this lord, who erst had been  
A landless squire, a servant of the Queen. 175

Now long a lord and clad in rich attire,  
In his fair hall he sat before the wine  
Watching the evening sun's yet burning fire  
Through the close branches of his pleasance shine,  
In mood of him who deems himself divine, 180  
Remembering not whereto we all must come,  
Not thinking aught but of his happy home.

## THE PROUD KING

From just outside loud mocking merriment  
He heard midst this ; and therewithal a squire  
Came hurrying up, his laughter scarcely spent, 185  
Who said, "My lord, a man in such attire  
As Adam's, ere he took the devil's hire,  
Who saith that thou wilt know him for the King,  
Up from the gate John Porter needs must bring.

"He to the King is nothing like in aught 190  
But that his beard he weareth in such guise  
As doth my lord : wilt thou that he be brought ?  
Perchance some treason neath his madness lies."  
"Yea," saith the ranger, "that may well be wise.  
But haste, for now am I right well at ease, 195  
Nor would be wearied with such folk as these."

Then went the squire, and coming back again,  
The porter and the naked King brought in,  
Who thinking now that this should end his pain,  
Forgat his fury and the porter's sin, 200  
And said, "Thou wonderest how I came to win  
This raiment, that kings long have ceased to wear,  
Since Noah's flood has altered all the air ?

"Well, thou shalt know, but first I pray thee, Hugh,  
Reach me that cloak that lieth on the board, 205  
For certes, though thy folk are leal and true,  
It seemeth that they deem a mighty lord  
Is made by crown, and silken robe, and sword ;  
Lo, such are borel folk ; but thou and I  
Fail not to know the signs of majesty. 210

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

“Thou risest not ! thou lookest strange on me !  
Ah, what is this ? Who reigneth in my stead ?  
How long hast thou been plotting secretly ?  
Then slay me now, for if I be not dead  
Armies will rise up when I nod my head. 215  
Slay me !—or cast thy treachery away,  
And have anew my favour from this day.”

“Why should I tell thee that thou ne’er wast king ?”  
The ranger said, “thou knowest not my mind ;  
Poor man, I pray God help thee in this thing, 220  
And, ere thou diest send thee days more kind ;  
And help from us a-going shalt thou find.  
Good fellows, this poor creature is but mad,  
Take him, and in a coat let him be clad ;

“And give him meat and drink, and on this night 225  
Beneath some roof of ours let him abide,  
For some day God may set his folly right.”  
Then spread the King his arms abroad and cried  
“Woe to thy food, thy house, and thee betide,  
Thou loathsome traitor ! Get ye from the hall, 230  
Lest smitten by God’s hand this roof should fall ;

“Yea, if the world be but an idle dream,  
And God deals nought with it, yet shall ye see  
Red flame from out these carven windows stream.  
I, I, will burn this vile place utterly, 235  
And strewn with salt the poisonous earth shall be  
That such a wretch of such a man has made,  
That so such Judases may grow afraid.”



## THE PROUD KING

Thus raving, those who held him he shook off  
And rushed from out the hall, nigh mad indeed, 240  
And gained the gate, not heeding blow or scoff,  
Nor longer of his nakedness took heed,  
But ran, he knew not where, at headlong speed  
Till, when at last his strength was fully spent,  
Worn out, he fell beneath a woody bent. 245

But for the ranger, left alone in peace,  
He bade his folk bring in the minstrelsy ;  
And thinking of his life, and fair increase  
Of all his goods, a happy man was he,  
And towards his master felt right lovingly, 250  
And said, "This luckless madman will avail  
When next I see the King for one more tale."

MEANWHILE Jovinian by the roadside lay,  
Panting, confused, scarce knowing if he dreamed,  
Until at last, when vanished was the day, 255  
Through the dark night far off a bright light gleamed ;  
Which growing quickly, down the road there streamed  
The glare of torches, held by men who ran  
Before the litter of a mighty man.

These mixed with soldiers soon the road did fill, 260  
And on their harness could the King behold  
The badge of one erst wont to do his will,  
A counsellor, a gatherer-up of gold,  
Who underneath his rule had now grown old :  
Then wrath and bitterness so filled his heart, 265  
That from his wretched lair he needs must start.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And o'er the clatter shrilly did he cry,  
"Well met, Duke Peter! ever art thou wise;  
Surely thou wilt not let a day go by  
Ere thou art good friends with mine enemies; 270  
O fit to rule within a land of lies,  
Go on thy journey, make thyself more meet  
To sit in hell beneath the devil's feet!"

But as he ceased a soldier drew anear,  
And smote him flatling with his sheathed sword, 275  
And said, "Speak louder, that my lord may hear  
And give thee wages for thy ribald word!  
Come forth, for I must show thee to my lord,  
For he may think thee more than mad indeed,  
Who of men's ways has taken wondrous heed." 280

Now was the litter stayed midmost the road,  
And round about, the torches in a ring  
Were gathered, and their flickering light now glowed  
In gold and gems and many a lordly thing,  
And showed that face well known unto the King, 285  
That, smiling, yesterday right humble words  
Had spoken midst the concourse of the lords.

But now he said, "Man, thou wert cursing me  
If these folk heard aright; what wilt thou then?  
Deem'st thou that I have done some wrong to thee, 290  
Or hast thou scathe from any of my men?  
In any case tell all thy tale again  
When on the judgment-seat thou see'st me sit,  
And I will give no careless ear to it."

## THE PROUD KING

“The night is dark, and in the summer wind      295  
The torches flicker; canst thou see my face?  
Bid them draw nigher yet, and call to mind  
Who gave thee all thy riches and thy place—  
—Well;—if thou canst, deny me, with such grace  
As by the fire-light Peter swore of old,      300  
When in that Maundy-week the night was cold—

“—Alas! canst thou not see I am the King?”  
So spoke he, as their eyes met midst the blaze,  
And the King saw the dread foreshadowing  
Within the elder’s proud and stony gaze,      305  
Of what those lips, thin with the lapse of days,  
Should utter now; nor better it befell;—  
“Friend, a strange story thou art pleased to tell;

“Thy luck it is thou tellest it to me,  
Who deem thee mad and let thee go thy way:      310  
The King is not a man to pity thee,  
Or on thy folly thy fool’s tale to lay:  
Poor fool! take this, and with the light of day  
Buy food and raiment of some labouring clown,  
And by my counsel keep thee from the town,      315

“For fear thy madness break out in some place  
Where folk thy body to the judge must hale,  
And then indeed wert thou in evil case—  
Press on, sirs! or the time will not avail.”  
—There stood the King, with limbs that gan to fail, 320  
Speechless, and holding in his trembling hand  
A coin new stamped for people of the land;

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Thereon, with sceptre, crown, and royal robe,  
The image of a King, himself, was wrought ;  
His jewelled feet upon a quartered globe, 325  
As though by him all men were vain and nought.  
One moment the red glare the silver caught,  
As the lord ceased ; the next his hurrying folk  
The flaring circle round the litter broke ;

The next, their shadows barred a patch of light, 330  
Fast vanishing, all else around was black ;  
And the poor wretch, left lonely with the night,  
Muttered, " I wish the day would ne'er come back,  
If all that once I had I now must lack :  
Ah God ! how long is it since I was King, 335  
Nor lacked enough to wish for anything ? "

Then down the lonely road he wandered yet,  
Following the vanished lights, he scarce knew why,  
Till he began his sorrows to forget,  
And, steeped in drowsiness, at last drew nigh 340  
A grassy bank, where, worn with misery,  
He slept the dreamless sleep of weariness,  
That many a time such wretches' eyes will bless.

**B**UT at the dawn he woke, nor knew at first  
What ugly chain of grief had brought him there, 345  
Nor why he felt so wretched and accursed ;  
At last remembering, the fresh morning air,  
The rising sun, and all things fresh and fair,  
Yet caused some little hope in him to rise,  
That end might come to these new miseries. 350

## THE PROUD KING

So looking round about, he saw that he  
To his own city gates was come anear ;  
Then he arose, and going warily,  
And hiding now and then for very fear  
Of folk who bore their goods and country cheer 355  
Unto the city's market, at the last  
Unto a stone's-throw of the gate he passed.

But when he drew unto the very gate,  
Into the throng of country-folk he came  
Who for the opening of the door did wait, 360  
Of whom some mocked, and some cried at him shame,  
And some would know his country and his name ;  
But one into his waggon drew him up,  
And gave him milk from out a beechen cup,

And asked him of his name and misery ; 365  
Then in his throat a swelling passion rose,  
Which yet he swallowed down, and, "Friend," said he,  
"Last night I had the hap to meet the foes  
Of God and man, who robbed me, and with blows  
Stripped off my weed and left me on the way : 370  
Thomas the Pilgrim am I called to-day.

"A merchant am I of another town,  
And rich enow to pay thee for thy deed,  
If at the King's door thou wilt set me down,  
For there a squire I know, who at my need 375  
Will give me food and drink, and fitting weed.  
What is thy name ? in what place dost thou live ?  
That I some day great gifts to thee may give."

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

“Fair sir,” the carle said, “I am poor enow,  
Though certes food I lack not easily ; 380  
My name is Christopher a-Green ; I sow  
A little orchard set with bush and tree,  
And ever there the kind land keepeth me,  
For I, now fifty, from a little boy  
Have dwelt thereon, and known both grief and joy. 385

“The house my grandsire built there has grown old,  
And certainly a bounteous gift it were  
If thou shouldst give me just enough of gold  
To build it new ; nor shouldst thou lack my prayer  
For such a gift.” “Nay, friend, have thou no care,” 390  
The King said : “this is but a little thing  
To me, who oft am richer than the King.”

Now as they talked the gate was opened wide,  
And toward the palace went they through the street,  
And Christopher walked ever by the side 395  
Of his rough wain, where midst the May-flowers sweet  
Jovinian lay, that folk whom they might meet  
Might see him not to mock at his bare skin :  
So shortly to the King’s door did they win.

Then through the open gate Jovinian ran 400  
Of the first court, and no man stayed him there ;  
But as he reached the second gate, a man  
Of the King’s household, seeing him all bare  
And bloody, cried out, “Whither dost thou fare ?  
Sure thou art seventy times more mad than mad, 405  
Or else some magic potion thou hast had,

## THE PROUD KING

“Whereby thou fear’st not steel or anything.”  
“But,” said the King, “good fellow, I know thee;  
And can it be thou knowest not thy King?  
Nay, thou shalt have a good reward of me, 410  
That thou wouldst rather have than ten years’ fee,  
If thou wilt clothe me in fair weed again,  
For now to see my council am I fain.”

“Out, ribald!” quoth the fellow: “What say’st thou?  
Thou art my lord, whom God reward and bless? 415  
Truly before long shalt thou find out how  
John Hangman cureth ill folk’s wilfulness;  
Yea, from his scourge the blood has run for less  
Than that which now thou sayest: nay, what say I?  
For lighter words have I seen tall men die. 420

“Come now, the sergeants to this thing shall see!”  
So to the guard-room was Jovinian brought,  
Where his own soldiers mocked him bitterly,  
And all his desperate words they heeded nought;  
Until at last there came to him this thought, 425  
That never from this misery should he win,  
But, spite of all his struggles, die therein.

And terrible it seemed, that everything  
So utterly was changed since yesterday,  
That these who were the soldiers of the King, 430  
Ready to lie down in the common way  
Before him, nor durst rest if he bade play,  
Now stood and mocked him, knowing not the face  
At whose command each man there had his place.

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

“Ah, God!” said he, “is this another earth 435  
From that whereon I stood two days ago?  
Or else in sleep have I had second birth?  
Or among mocking shadows do I go,  
Unchanged myself of flesh and fell, although  
My fair weed I have lost and royal gear? 440  
And meanwhile all are changed that meet me here;

“And yet in heart and nowise outwardly.”  
Amid his wretched thoughts two sergeants came,  
Who said, “Hold, sirs! because the King would see  
The man who thus so rashly brings him shame, 445  
By taking his high style and spotless name,  
That never has been questioned ere to-day.  
Come, fool! needs is it thou must go our way.”

So at the sight of him all men turned round,  
As twixt these two across the courts he went, 450  
With downcast head and hands together bound;  
While from the windows maid and varlet leant,  
And through the morning air fresh laughter sent;  
Until unto the threshold they were come  
Of the great hall within that kingly home. 455

Therewith right fast Jovinian's heart must beat,  
As now he thought, “Lo, here shall end the strife;  
For either shall I sit on mine own seat,  
Known unto all, soldier and lord and wife,  
Or else is this the ending of my life, 460  
And no man henceforth shall remember me,  
And a vain name in records shall I be.”



## THE PROUD KING

Therewith he raised his head up, and beheld  
One clad in gold set on his royal throne,  
Gold-crowned, whose hand the ivory sceptre held ; 465  
And underneath him sat the Queen alone,  
Ringed round with standing lords, of whom not one  
Did aught but utmost reverence unto him ;  
Then did Jovinian shake in every limb.

Yet midst amaze and rage to him it seemed 470  
This man was nowise like him in the face ;  
But with a marvellous glory his head gleamed,  
As though an angel sat in that high place,  
Where erst he sat like all his royal race.  
—But their eyes met, and with a stern, calm-brow 475  
The shining one cried out, “ And where art thou ?

“ Where art thou, robber of my majesty ? ”  
“ Was I not King,” he said, “ but yesterday ?  
And though to-day folk give my place to thee,  
I am Jovinian ; yes, though none gainsay 480  
If on these very stones thou shouldst me slay,  
And though no friend be left for me to moan,  
I am Jovinian still, and King alone.”

Then said that other, “ O thou foolish man,  
King was I yesterday, and long before, 485  
Nor is my name aught but Jovinian,  
Whom in this house the Queen my mother bore  
Unto my longing father, for right sore  
Was I desired before I saw the light ;  
Thou, fool, art first to speak against my right. 490

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

“And surely well thou meritest to die ;  
Yet ere I bid men lead thee unto death  
Hearken to these my lords that stand anigh,  
And what this faithful Queen beside me saith ;  
Then may'st thou many a year hence draw thy breath, 495  
If these should stammer in their speech one whit :  
Behold this face, lords, look ye well on it !

“Thou, O fair Queen, say now whose face is this !”  
Then cried they, “Hail, O Lord Jovinian !  
Long may'st thou live !” and the Queen knelt to kiss 500  
His gold-shod feet, and through her face there ran  
Sweet colour, as she said, “Thou art the man  
By whose side I have lain for many a year,  
Thou art my lord Jovinian lief and dear.”

Then said he, “O thou wretch, hear now and see ! 505  
What thing should hinder me to slay thee now ?  
And yet indeed, such mercy is in me,  
If thou wilt kneel down humbly and avow  
Thou art no King, but base-born, as I know  
Thou art indeed, in mine house shalt thou live, 510  
And as thy service is, so shalt thou thrive.”

But the unhappy King laughed bitterly,  
The red blood rose to flush his visage wan  
Where erst the grey of death began to be ;  
“Thou liest,” he said, “I am Jovinian, 515  
Come of great kings ; nor am I such a man  
As still to live when all delight is gone,  
As thou might'st do, who sittest on my throne.”

## THE PROUD KING

No answer made the other for a while,  
But sat and gazed upon him steadfastly, 520  
Until across his face there came a smile,  
Where scorn seemed mingled with some great pity.  
And then he said, "Nathless thou shalt not die,  
But live on as thou may'st, a lowly man,  
Forgetting thou wast once Jovinian." 525

Then wildly round the hall Jovinian gazed,  
Turning about to many a well-known face,  
But none of all his folk seemed grieved or mazed,  
But stood unmoved, each in his wonted place ;  
There were the Lords, the Marshal with his mace, 530  
The Chamberlain, the Captain of the Guard,  
Grey-headed, with his wrinkled face and hard,

That had peered down so many a lane of war ;  
There stood the grave ambassadors arow,  
Come from half-conquered lands ; without the bar 535  
The foreign merchants gazed upon the show,  
Willing new things of that great land to know ;  
Nor was there any doubt in any man  
That the gold throne still held Jovinian.

Yea, as the sergeants laid their hands on him, 540  
The mighty hound that crouched before the throne,  
Flew at him fain to tear him limb from limb,  
Though, in the woods, the brown bear's dying groan  
He and that beast had often heard alone.  
"Ah !" muttered he, "take thou thy wages too ; 545  
Worship the risen sun as these men do."

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

They thrust him out, and as he passed the door,  
The murmur of the stately court he heard  
Behind him, and soft footfalls on the floor,  
And, though by this somewhat his skin was seared, 550  
Hung back at the rough eager wind afeard;  
But from the place they dragged him through the gate,  
Wherethrough he oft had rid in royal state.

Then down the streets they led him, where of old  
He, coming back from some well-finished war, 555  
Had seen the line of flashing steel and gold  
Wind upwards twixt the houses from the bar,  
While clashed the bells from wreathed spires afar;  
Now moaning, as they haled him on, he said,  
“God and the world against one lonely head!” 560

**B**UT soon, the bar being past, they loosed their hold,  
And said, “Thus saith by us our Lord the King,  
Dwell now in peace, but yet be not so bold  
To come again, or to thy lies to cling,  
Lest unto thee there fall a worser thing; 565  
And for ourselves we bid thee ever pray  
For him who has been good to thee this day.”

Therewith they turned away into the town,  
And still he wandered on and knew not where,  
Till, stumbling at the last, he fell adown, 570  
And looking round beheld a brook right fair,  
That ran in pools and shallows here and there,  
And on the further side of it a wood,  
Nigh which a lowly clay-built hovel stood.

## THE PROUD KING

Gazing thereat, it came into his mind 575  
A priest dwelt there, a hermit wise and old,  
Whom he had ridden oftentimes to find,  
In days when first the sceptre he did hold,  
And unto whom his mind he oft had told,  
And had good counsel from him, though indeed 580  
A scanty crop had sprung from that good seed.

Therefore he passed the brook with heavy cheer  
And toward the little house went speedily,  
And at the door knocked, trembling with his fear,  
Because he thought, "Will he remember me?" 585  
If not, within me must there surely be  
Some devil who turns everything to ill,  
And makes my wretched body do his will."

So, while such doleful things as this he thought,  
There came unto the door the holy man, 590  
Who said, "Good friend, what tidings hast thou  
brought?"  
"Father," he said, "know'st thou Jovinian?  
Know'st thou me not, made naked, poor, and wan?  
Alas, O father! am I not the King,  
The rightful lord of thee and everything?" 595

"Nay, thou art mad to tell me such a tale!"  
The hermit said; "if thou seek'st soul's health here,  
Right little will such words as this avail;  
It were a better deed to shrive thee clear,  
And take the pardon Christ has bought so dear, 600  
Than to an ancient man such mocks to say  
That would be fitter for a Christmas play."

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

So to his hut he got him back again,  
And fell the unhappy King upon his knees,  
And unto God at last he did complain, 605  
Saying, "Lord God, what bitter things are these?  
What hast thou done, that every man that sees  
This wretched body, of my death is fain?  
O Lord God, give me back myself again!

"E'en if therewith I needs must die straightway. 610  
Indeed I know that since upon the earth  
I first did go, I ever day by day  
Have grown the worse, who was of little worth  
E'en at the best time since my helpless birth.  
And yet it pleased thee once to make me King: 615  
Why hast thou made me now this wretched thing?

"Why am I hated so of every one?  
Wilt thou not let me live my life again,  
Forgetting all the deeds that I have done,  
Forgetting my old name, and honours vain, 620  
That I may cast away this lonely pain?  
Yet if thou wilt not, help me in this strife,  
That I may pass my little span of life

"Not made a monster by unhappiness.  
What shall I say? thou mad'st me weak of will, 625  
Thou wrapped'st me in ease and carelessness,  
And yet, as some folk say, thou lov'st me still;  
Look down, of folly I have had my fill,  
And am but now as first thou madest me,  
Weak, yielding clay to take impress of thee." 630

## THE PROUD KING

So said he weeping, and but scarce had done,  
When yet again came forth that hermit old,  
And said, "Alas! my master and my son,  
Is this a dream my wearied eyes behold?  
What doleful wonder now shall I be told, 635  
Of that ill world that I so long have left?  
What thing thy glory from thee has bereft?"

A strange surprise of joy therewith there came  
To that worn heart; he said, "For some great sin  
The Lord my God has brought me unto shame; 640  
I am unknown of servants, wife, and kin,  
Unknown of all the lords that stand within  
My father's house; nor didst thou know me more  
When e'en just now I stood before thy door.

"Now since thou know'st me, surely God is good, 645  
And will not slay me, and good hope I have  
Of help from Him that died upon the rood,  
And is a mighty lord to slay and save:  
So now again these blind men will I brave,  
If thou wilt give me of thy poorest weed, 650  
And some rough food, the which I sorely need;

"Then of my sins thou straight shalt shrive me clean."  
Then weeping said the holy man, "Dear lord,  
What heap of woes upon thine head has been!  
Enter, O King, take this rough gown and cord, 655  
And what scant food my hovel can afford;  
And tell me everything thou hast to say;  
And then the High God speed thee on thy way."

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

So when in coarse serge raiment he was clad,  
He told him all that pride had made him think ; 660  
And showed him of his life both good and bad ;  
And then being houselled, did he eat and drink,  
While in the wise man's heart his words did sink,  
For, "God be praised !" he thought, "I am no king,  
Who scarcely shall do right in anything !" 665

Then he made ready for the King his ass,  
And bade again, God speed him on the way,  
And down the road the King made haste to pass  
As it was growing toward the end of day,  
With sober joy for troubles passed away ; 670  
But trembling still, as onward he did ride,  
Meeting few folk upon that even-tide.

SO to the city gate being come at last,  
He noted there two ancient warders stand,  
Whereof one looked askance as he went past, 675  
And whispered low behind his held-up hand  
Unto his mate, "The King, who gave command  
That if disguised this eve he pass this gate,  
No reverence we should do his kingly state."

Thereat with joy Jovinian smiled again, 680  
And so passed onward quickly down the street ;  
And well-nigh was he eased of all his pain  
When he beheld the folk that he might meet  
Gaze hard at him, as though they fain would greet  
His well-known face, but durst not, knowing well 685  
He would not any of his state should tell.



## THE PROUD KING

Withal unto the palace being come,  
He lighted down thereby and entered,  
And once again it seemed his royal home,  
For folk again before him bowed the head ; 690  
And to him came a Squire, who softly said,  
“ The Queen awaits thee, O my lord the King,  
Within the little hall where minstrels sing,

“ Since there thou bad'st her meet thee on this night.”  
“ Lead on then ! ” said the King, and in his heart 695  
He said, “ Perfay all goeth more than right,  
And I am King again ; ” but with a start  
He thought of him who played the kingly part  
That morn, yet said, “ If God will have it so,  
This man like all the rest my face will know.” 700

So in the Little Hall the Queen he found,  
Asleep, as one a spell binds suddenly ;  
For her fair broidery lay upon the ground,  
And in her lap her open hand did lie,  
The silken-threaded needle close thereby ; 705  
And by her stood that image of the King  
In rich apparel, crown and signet-ring.

But when the King stepped forth with angry eye  
And would have spoken, came a sudden light,  
And changed was that other utterly ; 710  
For he was clad in robe of shining white,  
Inwrought with flowers of unnamed colours bright,  
Girt with a marvellous girdle, and whose hem  
Fell to his naked feet and shone in them ;

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And from his shoulders did two wings arise, 715  
That, with the swaying of his body, played  
This way and that ; of strange and lovely dyes  
Their feathers were, and wonderfully made :  
And now he spoke, " O King, be not dismayed,  
Or think my coming here so strange to be, 720  
For oft ere this have I been close to thee.

" And now thou knowest in how short a space  
The God that made the world can unmake thee,  
And though He alter in no whit thy face,  
Can make all folk forget thee utterly, 725  
That thou to-day a nameless wretch may'st be,  
Who yesterday woke up without a peer,  
The wide world's marvel and the people's fear.

" Behold, thou oughtest to thank God for this,  
That on the hither side of thy dark grave 730  
Thou well hast learned how great a God He is  
Who from the heavens such countless rebels drave,  
Yet turns himself such folk as thee to save ;  
For many a man thinks nought at all of it,  
Till in a darksome land he comes to sit, 735

" Lamenting everything : so do not thou !  
For inasmuch as thou thought'st not to die  
This thing may happen to thee even now,  
Because the day unspeakable draws nigh,  
When bathed in unknown flame all things shall lie ; 740  
And if thou art upon God's side that day,  
Unslain, thine earthly part shall pass away.

## THE PROUD KING

“Or if thy body in the grave must rot,  
Well may'st thou see how small a thing is this,  
Whose pain of yesterday now hurts thee not, 745  
Now thou hast come again to earthly bliss,  
Though bitter-sweet thou knowest well this is,  
And though no coming day can ever see  
Ending of happiness where thou may'st be.

“Now must I go, nor wilt thou see me more, 750  
Until the day when, unto thee at least,  
This world is gone, and an unmeasured shore,  
Where all is wonderful and changed, thou seest  
Therefore, farewell ! at council and at feast  
Thy nobles shalt thou meet as thou hast done, 755  
Nor wilt thou more be strange to any one.”

So scarce had he done speaking, ere his wings  
Within the doorway of the hall did gleam,  
And then he vanished quite ; and all these things  
Unto Jovinian little more did seem 760  
Than some distinct and well-remembered dream,  
From which one wakes amidst a feverish night,  
Taking the moonshine for the morning light.

Silent he stood, not moving for a while,  
Pondering o'er all these wondrous things, until 765  
The Queen arose from sleep, and with a smile,  
Said, “O fair lord, your great men by your will  
E'en as I speak the banquet-chamber fill,  
To greet thee amidst joy and revelling,  
Wilt thou not therefore meet them as a King ? ” 770

## THE EARTHLY PARADISE

So from that place of marvels having gone,  
Half mazed, he soon was clad in rich array,  
And sat thereafter on his kingly throne,  
As though no other had sat there that day ;  
Nor did a soul of all his household say 775  
A word about the man, who on that morn  
Had stood there, naked, helpless, and forlorn.

But ever day by day the thought of it  
Within Jovinian's heart the clearer grew,  
As o'er his head the ceaseless time did flit, 780  
And everything still towards its ending drew,  
New things becoming old, and old things new ;  
Till, when a moment of eternity  
Had passed, grey-headed did Jovinian lie

One sweet May morning, wakeful in his bed ; 785  
And thought, " That day is thirty years a-gone  
Since useless folly came into my head,  
Whereby, before the steps of mine own throne,  
I stood in helpless agony alone,  
And of the wondrous things that there befell, 790  
When I am gone there will be none to tell :

" No man is now alive who thinks that he,  
Who bade thrust out the madman on that tide,  
Was other than the King they used to see :  
Long years have passed now, since the hermit died : 795  
So must I tell the tale, ere by his side  
I lie, lest it be unrecorded quite,  
Like a forgotten dream in morning light.

## THE PROUD KING

“Yea, lest I die ere night come, this same day  
Unto some scribe will I tell everything, 800  
That it may lie when I am gone away,  
Stored up within the archives of the King,  
And may God grant the words thereof may ring  
Like His own voice in the next comer's ears!  
Whereby his folk shall shed the fewer tears.” 805

So it was done, and at the King's command  
A clerk that day did note it every whit,  
And after by a man of skilful hand  
In golden letters fairly was it writ;  
Yet little heed the new King took of it 810  
That filled the throne when King Jovinian died,  
So much did all things feed his swelling pride.

But whether God chastised him in his turn,  
And he grew wise thereafter, I know not;  
I think by eld alone he came to learn 815  
How lowly on some day must be his lot.  
But ye, O Kings, think all that ye have got  
To be but gawds cast out upon some heap,  
And stolen the while the Master was asleep.



## NOTES TO ATALANTA'S RACE

LINE

63. **The Fleet-foot One**: Diana (in Greek, Artemis); her image is in silver because she was goddess of the moon. She is also called "the three-formed" goddess in line 275.
67. **His horn to wind**: to blow his horn. This is the verb of the noun *wind*, forming the preterite *winded*, and different from the other verb *wind* of which the preterite is *wound*.
167. **Centaur kings**: the Centaurs were a fabulous race of creatures, half men and half horses.
177. **Saffron gown**: the dress of a Greek bride.
184. **The Sea-horn One**: Venus; so also in lines 282 and 386.
206. **Dryads**: wood-fairies.

LINE

208. **Adonis' bane**: the wild boar, which killed Adonis.
224. **Must**: grape-juice in its first fermentation before it becomes wine.
279. **Her (whom) the moon-lit river sees**: Diana bathing at night.
343. **Heading**: beheading; so an executioner is called a headsman.
363. **Close-clipped murk**: Murk (French *marc*), is the refuse which remains after the juice has been squeezed out of grapes, or other fruit, in the press. Close-clipped: tight-squeezed; this verb *clip*, now almost obsolete, is a different word from *clip* meaning to cut; its noun is in common use, e.g. tie-clip, letter-clip.
535. **Saturn's clime**: the golden age.

## NOTES TO THE PROUD KING

LINE

10. **Daïs** : the raised floor at the upper end of a hall, on which the high table is set.
39. **Great of his hands** : strong and brave.
62. **Her the ancients fabled** : Diana, who, as the moon-goddess, was supposed to ride hunting at night.
89. **Pied** : parti-coloured. The bird meant is probably the pied wagtail.
89. **Nathless** : nevertheless.
127. **Fell** : skin (of a beast).
148. **Brown-bill** : a long two-handed axe, called brown from the colour of its wooden shaft; compare brown-bess, the popular name given to the English soldier's musket before it was replaced by the rifle.
151. **Hereby to go** : to go out again by this gate.
168. **Losel** : (literally, a lost one), a worthless person, a profligate.
209. **Borel folk** : rude or ignorant people ; literally, dressed in "bure" or frieze, a kind of coarse woollen stuff.
245. **Bent** : a hillside.

LINE

275. **Flatling** : with the flat side ; the O.E. adverbial suffix *-ling* only survives in a few words like this and *darkling*.
277. **Ribald** : indecent.
300. **Peter** : see S. Mark xiv. 71, and S. John xviii. 18.
370. **Weed** : attire ; we still speak of a widow's weeds.
380. **Certes food I lack not easily** : certainly I am well off for food.
452. **Varlet** : a man-servant.
480. **Gainsay** : oppose (speak against).
550. **Seared** : dried and grown rough.
558. **Wreathed spires** : spires hung with wreaths of flowers.
599. **Shrive thee clear** : to shrive is to receive a confession and grant absolution, and the reflexive verb thus means to confess and receive absolution, so as to be clear of sin. Compare line 652 below.
662. **Being houselled** : having received the sacrament.
696. **Perfay** : by my faith, assuredly (Fr. *par foi*).